

INTEGRATION OF THE EDUCATIONALLY  
BLIND, NUMBERS AND PLACEMENT.

By

Michael Colborne Brown & Michael Tobin

HV1944  
B 814  
In 8



HY 1944

B 814

In 8

copy two

c.2

INTEGRATION OF THE EDUCATIONALLY  
BLIND: PART 1, NUMBERS AND  
PLACEMENT

---

by  
M.S. Colborne Brown  
M.J. Tobin

1982

---

RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THE EDUCATION  
OF THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED  
Faculty of Education,  
University of Birmingham.





# INTEGRATION OF THE EDUCATIONALLY BLIND:

## PART 1, NUMBERS AND PLACEMENT

Published in: The New Beacon, May 1982, LXVI, 781, 113-117.

### Preamble

This paper is the first in a series reporting the results of an enquiry undertaken at Birmingham University's Research Centre for the Education of the Visually Handicapped into the provision made for blind children who are not attending special schools for the visually handicapped. Part 1 outlines the reasons for the enquiry, the methods used to identify the children and contact the parents, the response from L.E.A.s and parents and the numbers and distribution of the children. Subsequent parts will look at the implications of the responses, particularly in relation to the types and levels of support provided, and wished for, and the effect this could have on agencies and workers with the visually handicapped; the views and comments of the parents will also be reported, and an attempt will be made to draw some conclusions and offer recommendations where appropriate.

### Introduction

There were several reasons for undertaking this enquiry at this time. The Warnock Report (H.M.S.O., 1978) and the 1981 Education Act were already giving impetus towards the greater integration into mainstream schools of children with learning difficulties and, although children with a visual handicap constituted one of the groups which Warnock emphasised as likely to continue to need special education, there would obviously be a continuing move towards integrated programmes. This, in turn, could have significant consequences: on Local Education Authorities in respect of recruitment and training of qualified support staff, and in the provision of adequate resources; on suppliers of resource material, such as the R.N.I.B. as the major supplier of embossed material in the U.K. which even now can offer only very limited publication of educational material (for which, incidentally, it receives no direct government funding); on parents, unwilling to accept the established pattern of boarding schools and separation from home, but not fully aware of the implications, and alternatives; finally, and by no means least, on existing schools for the visually handicapped some of which could find their intake substantially affected in number and nature, and their future rôle ill-defined.

Another reason was the development, nationally, of services of Education Advisers and Peripatetic Teachers of the Visually Handicapped, a direct consequence of the recommendations in the Vernon Report (H.M.S.O., 1972). The R.N.I.B. alone now has a team of 10, and some 70 other professionals can be identified as having specific responsibility in these services. This means that a greater number of visually handicapped children than heretofore are known personally to specialist professionals in the education service, who are in a position not only to provide advice, but also practical support. As a result, many children, particularly young ones, who would previously have been in residential placement are now being cared within day placements. Nevertheless, these professionals tend to work in isolation, with no nationally agreed policy, and the interchange of experience and ideas is restricted.

*Comp. copy*  
*5/10/83*

Lastly, the transfer of responsibility from health to education authorities in 1971 of children hitherto classified as "ineducable" had brought to light many children whose vision defect was a major factor in retarding their development although the main emphasis was laid on the mental handicap. However, greater recognition is currently being given to the condition of "multiple handicap" where the vision defect, even if by itself minor, can have a very serious, multiplicative, effect and which therefore merits specialist attention.

So here was a picture of a number of children, known to individuals working with the visually handicapped, already in some form or another of "integrated education", ranging from much publicised placements in normal schools, with good support services, to children in E.S.N.(S.) and hospital schools with little or no support from people specialising in visual handicap. Alongside this, were several influences - statutory, philosophical, educational, professional, emotional, financial - likely to extend further placements in integrated education settings. Yet no one knew the total situation in terms of size, ability of children, or types of placement and it therefore seemed timely and desirable to try to clarify the position so that guidelines towards future policy and practice might be indicated.

#### Locating and Identifying the Children

The first step was to identify as many as possible of the children at present "integrated". A circular letter was sent in April, 1981, to the 107 Local Education Authorities in England and Wales, to 46 schools for the visually handicapped, and to Advisers and Peripatetic Teachers. The letter defined:

- (a) the intention of the project;
- (b) the visual limits of the children to be involved, as "dependent partly or wholly on non-printed material";
- (c) children, as "from pre-school age to school-leaving age or to the point where there is no alternative visual handicap provision";
- (d) "integrated" education as including full-time education in mainstream neighbourhood schools, including day special schools not specifically for the visually handicapped.

Deliberately, no reference was made to registration on Form B.D.8. as, contrary to popular belief, by no means all visually handicapped children are registered, or have had a B.D.8. completed.

It was realised that in many cases the 70 or so L.E.A. Advisers/Peripatetic Teachers would respond through the L.E.A.s, and there would therefore be some overlap of names submitted. However, by actually identifying, and indexing, each child this risk has been reduced to a minimum.

The letter further explained that if the L.E.A. was willing to co-operate by supplying names, addresses, dates of birth, and school placement of children coming within those definitions, parents would then be approached and, if they agreed, asked to complete a questionnaire and, if appropriate, be visited. Schools might also be contacted. It has, unfortunately, become absolutely clear that personal visits would be out of the question. It has taken longer than expected to get the responses in, and the numbers included have been far higher than expected.



# Results: Numbers and Distribution of Children

As Table 1 demonstrates, the response from L.E.A.s has been generous and gratifyingly high, considering the demands at present being made on their staff, and the pressures under which many are working. (Scotland and Northern Ireland are excluded from this survey because of administrative differences in the educational system, but figures for Northern Ireland will be available in due course.)

Table 1. Local Education Authority Responses.

A.1. Number of L.E.A.s contacted	107
A.2. Number of L.E.A.s responding in some measure	92 (85.98% of total)
A.3. No responses at all, despite at least 3 follow-up requests	15 (14.02% of total)
B.1. L.E.A.s providing an unqualified response to the information requested	66 (61.68% of total, 71.74% of A.2.)
B.2. L.E.A.s co-operating but requiring questionnaires to parents to be sent via L.E.A.	15 (14.02% of total, 16.30% of A.2.)
B.3. L.E.A.s responding only through personal visit	5 ( 4.67% of total, 5.43% of A.2.)
B.4. L.E.A.s not able to respond in further detail owing to lack of staff	3 ( 2.80% of total, 3.26% of A.2.)
B.5. L.E.A.s providing statistics but not willing to disclose names	3 ( 2.80% of total, 3.26% of A.2.)

Fourteen L.E.A.s reported that they had "no children within the scope of your survey in this Authority". It may be that some did not understand the circular letter, as several children from these L.E.A.s have been identified from other sources. It is, though, surprising to find that one London Borough has no children in the categories of the survey, while adjacent ones have several, and that the large Inner London Education Authority has "very few" of such children. Some of the L.E.A.s which did not respond (A.3.) may have felt that the information was adequately supplied by the R.N.I.B. Adviser servicing the Authority.

By 5th March, 1982, which was taken as the 'stop date' for information to be received and analysed, 999 children coming within the definitions of the survey had been identified with full details, as requested. A further 94 have been notified by L.E.A.s and Advisers, without giving full details. To

this can certainly be added a number of children in hospital schools or units where the enquiry may not have penetrated; as well as children in L.E.A.s who have made no response at all, and children in L.E.A.s which requested that the questionnaire be sent through them, but where not all the families would have responded.

In total, this number of at least 1,093 is far larger than anticipated, and should be seen in the context of the present blind school population of about 1,100. In other words, there are at least as many educationally blind children (more than half with severe additional handicaps) dispersed through dozens of units and schools throughout the country who do not come into the general thinking and planning for "blind school children"; and for whom there is no consistent pattern of servicing.

### Results: Questionnaires

On receiving names, the next stage was to distribute a letter to parents, explaining the reason for the survey, and asking permission to include their child in the survey. A questionnaire and stamped addressed envelope were enclosed.

The intention of the questionnaire was to 'flesh out' the bare facts supplied by L.E.A.s and Advisers with the parents' attitudes to their child's placement - what were the reasons for choosing the placement - what was the nature and extent of the visual handicap - when did they learn of it - from whom? Were there any other handicaps? How did he relate to his sighted peers - did he need more help, and of what sort, than his sighted siblings? What support did the family receive? Were they happy with the placement - was their child happy - did they feel his vision impairment was given sufficient attention?

It was realised that not all of these letters would reach their destination - change of/out of date address, children in hospital placement where parental contact no longer existed; and some might no longer be relevant in that the child's degree of visual handicap could have improved since first notification to the L.E.A. or Adviser. It should, however, be remembered that all the children identified as coming within our definition of "educationally blind", were notified by professionals of the education services, not simply on the basis of statistical returns. Some L.E.A.s asked that the letter and questionnaire be sent via them in order to preserve confidentiality.

In a number of cases the letter and questionnaire were not sent, on the advice of the Education Adviser (e.g. parents very sensitive to child's visual handicap, serious illness of child, extreme severity of multiple handicaps); or because the child was too young for the questionnaire to be relevant.

Altogether, 844 questionnaires were sent out and 416 have been returned - a response of about 50%.

The willingness of parents to respond to a lengthy questionnaire has been much appreciated, especially when one knows what so many of them have to contend with (one sympathizes with the parent who wrote, "Sorry for the delay - I lost you in the kitchen drawer!").

Almost all of the 114 children in mainstream schools (see Table 2, Category 1) are "one-off" placements. Some are at post-G.C.E. 'O' level (having moved from V.H. schools). A substantial number is at infant school, so might not necessarily remain in integrated education. It is probable that



Table 2. Distribution among Types of Placements.

	MALE		FEMALE		T O T A L	P E R C E N T
	Numbers Identified and Indexed	Percentage	Numbers Identified and Indexed	Percentage		
1. Mainstream School	70	12.22	44	10.33	114	11.41
2. Tapton/Mainstream	8	1.39	7	1.64	15	1.50
3. V.H. Class Attached to Mainstream School	7	1.22	8	1.88	15	1.50
4. P.H. School, including Deaf	44	7.68	32	7.51	76	7.61
5. E.S.N.(M.)	12	2.09	10	2.35	22	2.20
6. E.S.N.(S.), Special Care, Hospital School, etc.	339	59.16	249	58.45	588	58.86
7. Nursery School/Class	26	4.54	17	3.99	43	4.30
8. Not in School Placement	32	5.58	15	3.52	47	4.70
9. Insufficient Detail to Classify	8	1.39	13	3.05	21	2.10
10. As a Result of Information from Questionnaire, Outside Scope of Enquiry	27	4.71	31	7.28	58	5.81
TOTALS	573	99.98	237	100.00	999	99.99

some are placed in mainstream schools for other than strictly educational reasons. The great majority of the children identified (nearly 700) are in E.S.N.(S.), E.S.N.(M./S.), P.H., Special Care, Hospital and Hospital School. Some are in residential placement, but most on a daily basis, and the majority appear to be educated without a particular regard to the visual handicap. Admittedly with the combination of handicaps which affect so many of the children, it is difficult to determine whether the visual or mental impairment is the major restricting factor in the effective use of sight - the will to see, or the ability to see. However, by the very placement of these children, the emphasis is placed on the mental impairment, and it is unlikely that the staff working with the children get much input in understanding, and encouraging, any residual vision.

In recording the information received, and checking it against the questionnaires, it has been difficult sometimes to distinguish between placements in P.H., E.S.N.(M.) and E.S.N.(S.) schools. Where the placement is clearly indicated, this has been recorded, but some are vague, or amalgams of several categories. The distinction between these placements, and placements in mainstream schools for children without handicaps is however clear.

The Category 'Not in School Placement' (8) includes a few children receiving home tuition, and a number who have been identified but for whom placement is not yet confirmed, or who are too young to be attending on a regular full-time basis.

The names of some children (Category 9) were supplied without sufficient detail to be able to follow up; while those in Category 10 include children who have moved into schools for the visually handicapped since the survey started, left school, died, or whose parents did not wish to take part in the 'survey'.

The remaining two parts of this report will look in more detail at the responses in the questionnaires, providing a 'statistical' picture of the children (visual and family status, incidence of additional handicap, age at notification of visual handicap, etc.). It is proposed also to examine issues - more difficult to quantify - such as reasons for choosing (or merely accepting) the placement, the amount of extra help the children need, the support provided, their ability to relate to other children, and the reactions of parents, and children, to the placements. An attempt will then be made to draw conclusions and make some recommendations where appropriate.

#### References

- DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE. The Education of the Visually Handicapped. London: H.M.S.O., 1972.
- DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE. Special Educational Needs. London: H.M.S.O., 1978.

HV1944 Brown, Michael Colborne c.2  
B814 INTEGRATION OF THE EDUCATION-  
ALLY BLIND, NUMBERS AND  
PLACEMENT.

(1982)

Date Due


AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND  
15 WEST 16th STREET  
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10011



